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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Sikhism & The Crisis of Modernity- Extramarital Relationships

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Abstract

Sikhism is a householder's religion. The virtue of chastity holds a significant place in the Sikh ethos and Sikh ethical values. In Sikhism, there is no place for polygamy and polyandry. Sikh Gurus advocated the institution of monogamous marriage. Marriage in Sikhism is not a social contract. It is blissful and sacred union of two human beings. In the present era of technological and materialistic advancement, adultery or extramarital affairs diminish the spirit of this blissful union. Sikhism strictly prohibits the practice of illicit relations to protect the honour of women and to strengthen the foundations of the institution of family. In Sikhism, it is strongly believed that adultery is not merely a betrayal of mutual faith, which is the foundation of married life but also an unjust, sinful, unethical and blasphemous act. Adultery is a severe violation of Sikh ethical code of conduct. The teachings of Sikh Gurus are beacon light for present day younger generation and extremely relevant for married couples who are inclined to satisfy their lustful desires and move away from righteous path.

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INTRODUCTION

In the era of informational revolution, globalization, scientific and technological development, the present day civilization is facing the crisis of socio-ethical degeneration and manifold socio-cultural crisis. Though the humankind has made the tremendous growth in the various spheres, yet it is facing the crisis of modernity. No doubt, that modernity has its own advantageous and no one can deny the basic reality that present day development has enabled a person to conquer the poverty, food shortage, diseases etc. Though the technological advancement has made the geographical distances insignificant and facilitated a person to establish contacts with others within a blink of eye through internet, yet we are still confronted with the problems of mutual distrust, discontentment and unhappiness over our achievements. This is not a pessimistic view of the reality. Today the foundations of vital institutions like family and marriage have been badly shaken. The divorce rate among youth is alarming. Young couples are facing the crisis of betrayal of mutual faith. Husbands and wives are giving undue preference to materialistic comforts, epicurean way of life and satisfaction of their unrestrained desires. The intolerance, disloyalty and emotional frustration among married couples are on rise. People are very much concerned about the annual package and outward beauty of their life partners and they feel no shame in betraying their partners just for the sake of fulfilment of their wild physical, economic and emotional needs.

The Western cultures give as much freedom to women as to men. Moreover, cases of adultery by women, even married in monogamous societies, are common. Stoning to death in public, laid down as a punishment for an adulterous in Islam is indicative of polyandrous females. In addition, not to forget the prostitutes across the globe. As such, it would be wrong and very misplaced to generalize men as polygamous and women as monogamous. In other words, in the present-day social context, both men and women can and/or do behave polygamous, and, as such, the category that best describes them, or comes in close proximity to, would be Promiscuity. (Kaur, Birendra, 2006). In 'modern' society, moral values are at its lowest ebb. Prostitution, extramarital relations, adultery, carnal pleasure etc. have reached at its apex. Men are dissatisfied with their wives and women enjoy having affairs with other men. Besides, exhibition/exposure of body has become a fashion and a craze, especially among women.

Moral values are of no importance to such people. This phenomenon has reached such a stage that this type of women don't like to remain well-dressed or presentable in the presence of their husbands when they are at home; but like to look fascinating, sexy, beautiful damsel and even erotic in the presence of other men. Sikhism forbids such sinful exhibition of a female body. (Dilgeer, Harjinder Singh, Who Are the Sikhs?, 2000). Sikhism accorded the due regard to women and elevated her status in the society. Sikh Gurus played a significant role to improve the general attitude towards women. They acknowledged her feminine attributes and taught that these attributes are essential for the reunion with the Infinite Reality.

The Teachings of Sikh Gurus and the Menace of Adultery:

To protect the foundations of institution of marriage and household life, Sikh Gurus severely repudiated the practice of infidelity, and unreserved and unethical quest for the satisfaction of physical needs. They uphold the ethical values like chastity, truthfulness, contentment and honesty at the highest pedestal. It is the impact of their teachings that Sikhs earned the incredible place in the history. Even Muslim historian like Qazi Nur Mohammad made some telling remarks about the character of the Sikhs. He found that they (Sikhs) respect the chastity of women as part of their faith and honour and adultery does not exist among them. (Singh, Sangat, 2001).

In Sikhism *kam* (sensuality) is not unrestricted gratification of carnal desires, but an impulse, which needs to be kept under check like other impulses and passions. Unrestrained propensity towards *kam*, especially sexual relationship outside the marital bond, is condemned in the strongest terms in Sikh codes of conduct as well as in the Scripture. It is a destructive evil and a deadly sin. While prescribing self-control, restraint, and not total annihilation of *kam*, the Gurus suggested two ways of channelizing and sublimating it. On the one hand, they pronounced *grihastha* or married life to be the ideal one, and, on the other laid down love of God and absorption in His Name as the essential principle of spiritual discipline. (Joshi, L. M., 2013).

Sikhism is a householder's religion and the marriage for a true Sikh is a sacred institution. Cohabiting with a partner who is not a spouse is strictly forbidden in Sikhism. In Sikhism, there is no place for extra marital relationships. For a true Sikh of Guru Nanak, truthful and ethical living is higher than truth. For him, the woman of another person is like mother, sister, and daughter. Adultery is one of the four prohibitions (*Bajar Kurahits*) to be followed strictly by a Sikh. Its violation makes a Sikh an apostate and he/she has to undergo religious punishment and must get reinitiation. (Dilgeer, Harjinder, Dictionary of Sikh Philosophy, 2005). Once Guru Gobind Singh was questioned on the subject of marriage relations, the Guru uttered the following words: When I received understanding, my father Guru Tegh Bahadur gave me this instruction, 'O son, as long as there is life in thy body, make this thy sacred duty ever to love thine own wife more and more. Approach not another woman's couch either by mistake or even in a dream. Know that the love of another's wife is as a sharp dagger'. Believe me; death enters the body by making love to another's wife. They, who think it great cleverness to enjoy another's wife, shall in the end die the death of dogs. (Mansukhani and Ramesh Chander Dogra, 1996).

Duties relating to chastity are meant to regulate marital relations and to ensure respect for fidelity in the family and avoidance of adultery. In order to ensure that the conflict between the Sikhs and others may not lead to disrespect and molestation of the womenfolk of the others, the compilers lay great stress on this duty. In many codes, this aspect has been clearly identified as the compilers forbid expressly any sex relations with the female members of the other communities. But the injunctions also forbid adultery in general, whoever be the parties to it. (Singh, Avtar, 1996).

In Sikhism, there are also injunctions against adultery, both by men and women. Extra-marital relations are declared immoral. Men are directed to respect women and regard daughters of other men as their own and other men's wives as their mothers or sisters. It is only such a Sikh who carefully follows this injunction also that is considered to be a moral man. (*Ibid*). *Sri Guru Granth Sahib's* concern for the sufferings of women got concrete shape through banning female-infanticide, sati-system and support for widow-remarriage and declaring adultery a taboo for both men and women. (Kumar, 2004).

Guru Gobind Singh rigorously prohibited the adultery and taught their followers that "*Par nari ki sej, bhul supne hun na jaiyo.*" i.e. a true Sikh should not approach to the bed of another's women even in his dream." At the time of creation of Khalsa Panth in 1699, Guru Gobind Singh instructed his baptized Sikhs to wear the Five K's, which also includes *Kachhehra* i.e. short drawers. It connotes chastity as well as the Sikh rejection of the ascetic tradition that equated nudity with the natural condition of man; this symbol also stands in sharp contrast to the Brahminical practice of wearing unstitched lower garment (*dhoti*). (Ahluwalia, 2001). *Kachhehra* in Khalsa code of life symbolise the ethical living and control over forceful passions. Bhai Nand Lal in his *Tankahnama* made it clear that Guru Gobind Singh does not adore a person who has an affair with another's women.

Sikh Gurus not only denounced the practice of adultery but they also pointed out the illicit behaviour of men and women and prevailing ethical degeneration in the Medieval Indian society. In their divine compositions,

they underlined the root causes of adultery and its ill effects on those who practise it. They also suggested the remedy to overcome the human weaknesses, which inspires him or her to shake the foundations of household and married life by developing the passionate romantic affairs and illegitimate physical relationships outside of the marriage.

Guru Nanak had categorized the people who failed to remember the real objective of their birth and practised the unethical way of life. To him, egocentric, lustful, shameless and wicked people are inclined to involve in adulterous ways. He observed that, "An apostate's mind covets another's woman." (Singh, Manmohan, 1993). He said, "It is the habit of thieves, adulterers, prostitutes and pimps that they contract friendship with the irreligious. They know not the worth of God's praise and *Satan* ever abides within them. (*Ibid*) Bhagat Beni said, "Man abandons meditation, toilsome service, self-restraint and propensity towards good actions and repeats not pervading Lord's Name. His lust overflows, blackness attaches to his understanding and then he hugs to his bosom another's woman. In the ardour of youth, he stars at the faces of other wives and distinguishes not between good and evil. In the intoxication of lust and other great sins he goes amiss and distinguishes not vice from virtue." (*Ibid*).

Sikh Gurus were strong critics of inbuilt human weaknesses. They found that unrestrained greed for the contentment of human desires continually persuades a person to carry out the sinful deeds. Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Sikh Guru, said, "The lustful and sensuous man desires many women and his spying of others homes ceases not. Day by day he commits adultery and then regrets, in woe and greed he withers away." (*Ibid*) He felt that, "Man amasses millions and lacs of millions but restrains not his mind. He longs for more and more. He possesses beautiful women of so many kinds, but still he commits adultery in other's houses. Between bad and good he distinguisher not." (*Ibid*).

Sikh Gurus also believed that adulterous and sinful deeds are foremost obstacles in the way of spiritual emancipation. They always bring disgrace, pain and suffering. Guru Nanak said, "Attached to another's woman and other's wealth and slander, they eat poison and suffer pain." (*Ibid*). Guru Arjan Dev said, "As is the companionship of a venomous serpent so is the ravishing of another's wife." (*Ibid*). To him, "The fools who drink wine of evil understanding become husbands of concubines." (*Ibid*). Sikh Gurus had also made harsh comments on the corrupt representatives of various religious traditions who were unethical in their actions, observed outward religiosity, and emphasise on the performance of empty rituals. Guru Nanak said, "Excessive desire wells up in the mind of the ascetic with a patched coat, who has a bowl in his hand. Abandoning his own wife, he is engrossed in just and attaches his mind to another's woman. He instructs others; He reflects not on the Name and attached himself to a whore. With poison in his mind, from without he pretends to be doubt free. So Yama humiliates him." (*Ibid*). Guru Arjan Dev said, "Thou hast abandoned thy own wife and casted evil eye on another's woman. Wearing religious garb, the Lord is attained not and one becomes very miserable. Man turns taciturnist and speak not. Within him is desire and he is make to wander in species. Abstaining from corn, his body suffers pain. He realises not the Lord's will and is engrossed in worldly love." (*Ibid*).

Bhagat Namdev, "The blind -man abandons the wife of his home, and has an affair with another's woman, He is like the parrot, who is pleased to see the tree of bombax heptaphylum, but at last dies clinging to it." (*Ibid*). Guru Arjan Dev said, "Closing the doors and behind so many screen the man enjoys with another's woman. When God's agents call for Thy account, who shall screen thee, then?" (*Ibid*) He also said, "They, who go to enjoy other man's women, they alone shall suffer shame. They, who ever steal others wealth, how can their sins be concealed? (*Ibid*). He said, "For a moment's sexual pleasure thou shalt suffer torture for millions of days. For an instant and a trice thou shall enjoy revetments but afterwards thou shalt repent again and again." (*Ibid*)

Guru Nanak said, "As an unchaste woman, who gives her body to a stranger, and for the sake of lust or money whose mind falls unto another's power, is never satisfied without her spouse, so is the man of duality." (*Ibid*). Bhai Gurdas, a renowned Sikh theologian, said, "Just as a woman who has many lovers, leaves her husband and turns into a prostitute. She has no particular master to call her own. If she gives birth to a son, he carries no name of maternal or paternal grandparents. She embellishes her nose with rings and studs. She deceives and attracts others with her many loving gestures and charms. Like the music hunters that attracts deer, she too allures the self oriented persons in the net of her charm who keeps her company. She departs from this world in sin and immorality." (Puri, Vol. 2, 2009) Bhai Gurdas also said, "How will a woman with a multi tastes and desires (a prostitute) and who uses countless deceits enamour the Lord husband?" (Puri, Vol. 1, 2009). He found that, "A prostitute looks beautiful and can infatuate anyone easily. But her end is always ugly and miserable." (Puri, Vol. 2, 2009).

Bhai Gurdas had also marvellously illustrated the code of ethical life for a Sikh, which could create a secure environment for women to move freely. He said, "Seeing beautiful women of others, Gursikh should treat and behave towards them as mothers, elder sisters and daughters." (Puri, Vol. 1, 2009). If people observe this kind of righteous and ethical way of life then there will be no problem of gender crimes and sense of insecurity among women. If men give respect to the dignity of women only then women can make progress in different spheres of life

and could enjoy their women's rights. It is socio-religious obligation of a true Sikh to give a due regard to the honour and self-respect of women. For him, it is an essential to abstain from unethical extra martial relations. For him, his married and household life is the real laboratory to test his faith in the eternal message of revered Sikh Gurus. Guru Amar Das, the third Sikh Guru, said, "If man practises the Truth; this includes continence, chastity and self-control." (Singh, Manmohan, 1993). Guru Ram Das, the fourth Sikh Guru, said, "By abandoning other's women good man practises celibacy." (Ibid). He said, "Put aside the lust for belles and leave worldly love. Then shalt thou obtain the bright Lord amidst the dark world." (Ibid). Guru Arjan Dev said, "Remember and hear God's Name and bestow it as alms unto all. So shall thy filth of evil actions of many births be removed and pride vanish from thy heart. Lust and wrath shall not seduce thee and the dog of greed shall be destroyed. The world praises those who walk along the true way." (Ibid). Guru Nanak said, "Worship without faith, discipline without truthfulness and sacred thread without chastity; Of what avail are that. One may bath, wash his body and apply sacrificial; mark to his forehead, but without the Lord's meditation, there can be no piety?" (Ibid).

Conclusion:

Sikhism has raised the strong objections on adultery. Sikh Gurus had harshly denounced those men and women who have extramarital relationships. They did not tolerate any kind of unethical practices, which could ruthlessly hit the marital bonds, reduce the dignity of men and women, disturb the social ties and family peace and ultimately lead to socio-ethical degeneration. They strongly believed that a religious person is one who is ethical in his conduct and truthful in his/her relationships with spouse. An adulterous, immoral and wicked person cannot achieve the goal of spiritual salvation. It is an essential for the individual to be committed, dedicated and honest to his partner. Adultery always open the door of defame and humiliation whereas the truthfulness and honesty in marital relations always bring the peace of mind, reverence, fame and respect for an individual in all spheres of life.

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